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Christian Character Appreciated.

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DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL OF

MRS. FANNY GRANT,

APRIL 26, 1850,

EAST STAFFORD, CONN.

BY REV. GEORGE H. WOODWARD.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE FRIENDS.

HARTFORD.

PRESS OF ELIHU GEER, 10 STATE STREET.

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S E R M O N .

“THIS IS A GRIEVOUS MOURNING.” Gen. 50:11.

THE text is the exclamation of the inhabitants of Canaan, in view of the funeral obsequies of the patriarch Jacob.

He had gone down to Egypt, at the age of an hundred and thirty years, to abide with his son Joseph. His life thus far had been a checkered one; nor was it long, compared with others before him. He said to Pharaoh, “Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and I have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage.”

He lived seventeen years with his son in Egypt and then departed to his final rest.

I have recently noticed, in this place, many *afflictive incidents* in the life of Jacob.

These I am not now about to rehearse.

We all know he had abundant reason to speak of the evils of his pilgrimage; but when we view the texture of that *character* which Providence wove for him, we readily perceive that those natural evils were also divine mercies.

His character, in most respects, is worthy of our study and imitation. He stands high in sacred history, and is distinguished in his patriarchal association.

He is one of the three whose names so often occur together—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—one of the three with whom especially God established and re-confirmed his covenant.

Jacob's life presents the greatest variety of all the three, and is perhaps, on the whole, most profitable for the study of the common Christian. There was indeed variety in the life of Abraham, but without any signal checks on his road to prosperity and greatness; and in him there was more of magnificence and royalty. Isaac's seems to have been a less *prominent* course and one of more even tenor, and his character very pacific and yielding, yet well sustaining his patriarchal piety.

Jacob's was a life of great hardships and dangers, and deep family distresses. Hence there is more *domestic culture* and piety observable in his life than in the life of Isaac, and of a different aspect from that of Abraham. Here, and in his general character also, we notice traits of great excellence.

He was distinguished for his *meekness* — always very forbearing under provocations and injuries, and submissive under afflictions.

Sometimes the sense of injustice done him uttered itself; but it was in a simple *statement* of the wrong, as when he spoke of Laban's perfidy. Again, his spirit, almost broken under weighty sorrows, vented out itself in brief but uncomplaining expressions, as when he exclaimed, "all these things are against me." And, at another time, on occasion of the supposed death of Joseph by the violence of wild beasts, when "all his sons and daughters rose up to comfort him; and he *refused to be comforted*; and he said, For I will go down into my grave unto my son mourning."

What meekness did he all along exhibit, first towards his domestic enemy, Esau, in *leaving* the quarrel that arose between them through the indiscreetness of his mother, and forsaking his paternal roof in a long and painful exile, rather than take the attitude of contention and resistance! What patience of injury did he exercise when most cruelly *imposed* upon by Laban, and again and again perfidiously misused! *When* do we notice any outbreak of anger in all the grievous family broils between wives and children, himself so deeply involved?

Meekness and submission characterised him through all his checkered course—a meekness and submission that were grounded on an unwavering trust in God and a thorough consciousness of personal integrity.

This reliance on God, which was the foundation of his Christian *endurance*, manifested itself also in eniment *communion with God*, and in his *habit of prayer*.

He lived near to God, as is evinced in his intercourse with him on that wonderful night, when, in his course of expatriation, he slept alone in the wild desert on the pillow of stone, which he made a pillar of consecration, and vowed a tenth of his income to the Lord—also seen in that free reference to the will of God as to continuance in the land of strangers and peculiar trials, while

tending the flock of his father-in-law ; and more eminently manifest at the time of his return in the face of sworn destruction by the vengeful hand of a brother. The decided and deliberate commending himself and his dear interests to God, in that memorable prayer which he then uttered, truly exhibits the characteristic of a man of habitual prayer. But most magnificently so does he appear in that *night of wrestling*, when he stood up face to face with the Angel-Jehovah and sought help in that time of need, with the humble boldness of one who *knew how* to approach the throne of grace ; for, as a prince he had power with God and with men and prevailed—hence his name *Israel*.

O that we had more Israels in the church—more nightly and daily wrestlers with God ! When we *have* them and *lose* them we mourn.

But more particularly as to his private and domestic virtues—He possessed peculiarly the noble traits of the shepherd of those days. And he was not ashamed of his calling, for he well understood the principle that “honor and shame from no *condition* rise ;” and instead of suffering his employment to detract his character, he elevated and honored his calling by his noble bearing and his gentle piety.

This was *the* thing that begat him such credit in Egypt. The nobleness and religious greatness of his person effaced, from even the minds of the Egyptians, their national prejudice against his employment.

Although shepherds were proverbially an abomination to the Egyptians, the exhibition of Jacob’s personal excellencies in that employment, cleared them of that ancient and deep-rooted prejudice, and constrained their respect for his virtues ; proving that a consistent Christian bearing is sure to exalt a man and his works—yea, more than fortunes or a princely birth.

In his family he was worthy of our admiration. He moved there not in a lordly and tyrannical manner, yet with a commanding influence. Behold the deference of the sons for the authority of the father, even in their mature years !

He possessed peculiarly a domestic heart. His love for his children was his ruling passion. His natural affections centred on them, and in the pursuit of their welfare ; and, no doubt, in a

way that made him the *worthy* head of that great family, the Israelites, whose twelve tribes were represented by his sons.

But his was a *sanctified* affection ; for, as we learn, he loved his children and sought their welfare, in no small degree, in view of the *promise*, on which his faith firmly rested ; just as now the pious parent's love and solicitude for his children are expanded by his faith in *covenant blessings*, and by the hope that his children may through grace, become inheritors of the glorious Land of Promise, the rest of the saints.

I thus hint at the traits of Jacob's character for the sake of the text, which refers to his funeral obsequies — “This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians.”

It was called by the Canaanites a “mourning of the Egyptians,” because the great company, that followed his remains to burial and bewailed his death by the way, were *from Egypt* where he died, a concourse both of Israelites and Egyptians.

The history of the occasion is recorded as follows : After the embalming was ended “Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh saying—My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die ; in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go I pray thee and bury my father, and I will come again. And Joseph went up to bury his father ; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the house of Joseph and his brethren and his father's house ; only their little ones, and their flocks and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him chariots and horsemen ; and it was a very great company. And they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation ; and he made a mourning for his father seven days.”

And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad they said, “*This is a grievous mourning* to the Egyptians.” Therefore the place was named in commemoration of this fact, “*Abel-misraim*,” the mourning of the Egyptians.

Here was a hearty flowing forth of grief and a concurrence in the demonstration of sorrow by the very nation itself, nay, by the

combined nations then in Egypt. Never, it has been said, except it be in the case of Alexander the Great, has history recorded such magnificent funeral solemnities.

One has remarked that "The mourning retinue was composed of an itinerant national multitude, which swelled like a flood and moved like a river. The Canaanites were evidently astonished at the expression of the overwhelming sorrow evinced by the Egyptians. 'Surely,' they would say, 'this man must have been greatly revered or greatly beloved in Egypt.' Probably never before had they witnessed such cries of grief uttered, never so many tears shed, for a single man."

Doubtless respect for *Joseph* and sympathy with him had a share of influence on the occasion; but mainly, beyond a doubt, the exhibition was respect for the character of the deceased patriarch, his *personal worth*.

Many seek the exaltation of wealth and office, that they may swell the retinue which shall attend them to the grave, at least as a *semblance* of grief.

But the example in the text shows what *excellence of character* will do.

True personal worth, in the departed, will exact of the living expressions of respect, and of sorrow for their decease. "Jacob," it has well been said, "who was willing to be a servant in Syria, and 'for a wife to keep sheep,' surely never affected splendor in his life-time. Yet he is honored with a funeral as splendid as if he had been a king."

I, of course, could not predict, as circumstances were, what would be the *numbers* in attendance on the present occasion. The deceased being absent from us in her last sickness, for some days we were expecting that her remains might at any time be returned and we be called suddenly to her funeral.*

*MRS. GRANT left her home in Stafford, in feeble health, October, 1849, to reside a few months with her son-in-law, Rev. James A. Hazen, of South Williamstown, Mass. Soon after arriving there she was taken more ill, and continued to decline, suffering much from the severity of her disease, till April 23d, when she was released from the pains of this mortal state.

I did, however, well know that her funeral would be an occasion of "grievous mourning."

It was evident, from the character of the deceased that there would be a burst of sorrow throughout the community—that this place would be truly a "*Bochim*." Why? Because a prince has fallen? We have no princes but those that are such in moral worth. Yes, she was a princess among us, in moral goodness and Christian excellence. In this respect few could stand higher; few could command so true homage of the heart.

She never proclaimed her own goodness, nor could she have believed herself to be preëminently possessed of it; still she stood singularly high in the esteem of all in the community, far above enmity and reproach.

No tongue ever moved against her; nay, every one spoke in her praise. She had won her way to every heart that knew her, and despoiled even rankling prejudice of its venom.

And this was not because her's was a mere negative character; but, as I say, there was a positive *worth* that won the homage of the heart.

That worth was mainly *Christian* worth. Not that there were wanting any natural qualities to have made her an estimable member of society. She was sufficiently intelligent and discriminating, heartily concurring in every wise educational and social enterprise, and well understood how to manage the varied interests of her household. She possessed much natural amiableness of character, conjoined too with no small degree of firmness, as is evident when we reflect upon the manner in which she sustained the weight of responsibility, which her widowhood laid upon her.

But her *Christian virtues* were peculiarly what made her so valuable in society, and so loved. She was chosen in the furnace of affliction. And that furnace seven times heated, it was, that greatly refined her spirit and constituted in her mind an unflinching purpose in calmly encountering all the severe claims of duty. She was called, in the providence of God to follow three husbands to the land of silence, and to close the eyes of children and grand-children in death. This, with all the attendant afflictions, and the toil of rearing a family unaided and alone, was enough to lead her to look away from earth as a place of rest, and to fix her unshaken reliance

on the widow's God and Judge. Thus she evidently did, deriving *thence* strength for the assiduous duties of her station.

Doubtless, with the imperfections of our nature, she often came short of a perfect standard; yet there was always a charm of consistency and gracefulness in her Christian character. She was never unstable, carried about by every wind of doctrine, but was well grounded in faith and practice. She loved the pure unadulterated Word, and unsophisticated doctrines of the cross — sound speech, plain and direct preaching, and undisguised profession, being peculiarly averse to the mere sounding of words and the love which is only in tongue, but not in deed and in truth. Profession and a reputation for religion did not suffice for her; but she sought a thorough work of grace in the heart, that the very *lurkings* of sin which no eye but God's can detect, might be purged out. For this purpose she was assiduous in the use of means, always prompt in attendance on the public worship of God, *loving* the place where his honor dwells, and constant in reading the Word and in observance of secret prayer.

The social prayer meeting was ever encouraged by her presence. She believed that God was pleased with the agreeing-together of his children as touching any thing they should ask of him for the prosperity of Zion. Often has the female prayer meeting consisted of herself and one or two others; for she believed that the promise would be made good to two or three, who should meet together in the name of Christ.

Her mind was deeply impressed with a sense of the need of *divine influence*, in the conversion and sanctification of men.

Her impression of the depth and obstinacy of her own native depravity was very striking; hence her hope of salvation, in a proper use of instrumentality, was alone in the grace of God. She was remarkably free from dependance on her own works, as in the least degree meritorious, and from any presumption in her expression of confidence in her hope of heaven — confident indeed in the merit of Christ, but not in her own heart. Often did she very expressively say that Christ was all her salvation, and that "the rest for the people of God" would be glorious "*if we do but really attain unto it.*"

Humility was a very *prominent* trait in her character, she always

being accustomed very feelingly to speak of her unprofitableness. Why she was continued on earth, she could not tell, as she remarked two or three times in my last interviews with her; "So unprofitable, so useless—creation's blot, creation's blank!"

Beloved saint! She lived not uselessly long. Her prayers, to her latest breath, were worth more than the many lauded deeds of statesmen and heroes. Her humility, however, did not make her the less brilliant or the less happy. She *lived* by her religion, and her piety ever produced a dignified calmness and cheerfulness.

Humility is a rich gem, and a sweet ingredient of Christian character. It softens and harmonizes, and gives a polish ever reflecting its pleasing lustre; and it produces a relish for the doctrines of the cross and the precious promises, that enables the soul to feast on the word as a "feast of fat things."

As our deceased friend valued the Savior, so too she loved his disciples and his cause, and was ever a ready and cheerful giver to sustain its interests. Like Obed-edom, she gave place, on her own premises, for the Ark of God, and systematically contributed for the support of the Gospel at home and abroad.

She was kind, and meek, and peaceful. Hers was not a tongue of slander. These neighbors are witnesses that neighborhood broils were not stirred up by that Christian sister.

She thought the best possible of all others, and either decidedly rebuked or charitably construed every ill report. Neighbors! we shall sadly miss her conciliatory spirit—we shall miss her words of kindness, and sustain a loss in the absence of her consistent example and in the cessation of her prayers; it is meet that we should mourn. Her death has made a breach in the community and in the church.

Yes, her place will know her no more; she has passed away, and her face in the flesh we shall no longer see.

Blessed dead! she rests from her labors and her works do follow. We will endeavor to appreciate those works and profit by the excellences of her character.

The pang of grief, which is caused in the circle of her acquaintance by the intelligence of her death, is unknown in the circle of many a devotee of fame who dies. Yes, a proud statesman, whose clamor for honor has filled the whole hemisphere, may die unwept;

but the retiring woman, who has silently formed and maintained a lovely, consistent Christian character, dies lamented by all, and her remains are conveyed away to the land of silence in the midst of "grievous mourning."

But as our departed friend was more fully known, so was she doubtless more tenderly loved and devotedly honored in her domestic circle, and there will she be most sadly lamented.

She was a mother in Israel; but she was *the* mother of her own dear children. Stronger affection is rarely, if ever found, than there existed.

She was a tender, but discreet and faithful parent. Her discipline was wise and wholesome. The secret of it was this — *she sought to train her children for God and immortality.*

Like the patriarch Jacob she labored and prayed for the fulfilment in them of *covenant promises*. And nothing would so have mitigated the pains of her dying hours, as the blest assurance that they all had "chosen that good part," which could never be taken away from them. With joy would she have exclaimed, "*now* lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." O, let that mother's blessings on your souls never be forgotten. Remember her love, her agonising prayer, her earnest and faithful instruction; and prepare to meet her in yon world of light, where sorrow and sighing shall be no more.

The brothers and sisters will soon follow this loved sister to the world of spirits.* Let her example inspire your faith and labor of love, and cheer you in the few remaining trials and conflicts of this vale of tears. And let the blest assurance that "there remaineth a rest to the people of God," and that "we, which believe, do enter into rest," fill you with all joy, in view of that dear sister's present conscious felicity, and the Saviour's promise to *all* his disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you—I will come again and receive *you* to myself, that where I am there *ye* may be also."

Very trying has been the scene through which you have passed

* One brother, Minor Grant, did soon follow. He suddenly died in one week from the day of her burial. They loved much while ardently serving the Church here below, and had ever felt that one could not spare the other. They were not long separated; and we joyfully trust that now, together, they are receiving a large reward.

in connection with her dissolution. It has been one of suspense and of anguish to the hearts, especially of those of her children, who have been much with her in her sickness. It was, doubtless, grateful to your filial feelings to minister, as you could, to her suffering body, and to aid her mind in the season of sore conflict.

But your hearts have been crushed in seeing the dear mother and friend called to pass through so deep waters and to buffet those overwhelming waves. Had your confidence in God failed you, your hearts too would have failed. But you knew, and she also, and felt it, that "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground," and have learned also to "despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when rebuked of him." She suffered, as we learn, in these last days with the same cheerful resignation that characterised her previous seasons of sickness in the midst of us.

To the last she referred all to the will of Him, whom she had ever found it good to trust; and from the heart could say,

"It is the Lord, my covenant God,
Thrice blessed be his name;
Whose gracious promise, sealed with blood,
Must ever be the same."

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Among her last words was an affectionate and confident appeal to her Saviour. She affirmed her sense of his preciousness, and added, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." His response we know was, "*Lo, I come!*" — AND RECEIVED HER TO HIMSELF.

It is delightful to think of her as now in that long-wished-for rest, having ended the cares, the trials, the conflicts of earth; done with sin and sorrow, done with pain and sickness and death, to be "ever with the Lord."

"No chilling winds, or poisonous breath,
Can reach that healthful shore;
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death,
Are felt and feared no more."

